

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 20, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write again to respectfully request that you posthumously award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Rafer Lewis Johnson, a decorated athlete, actor, and public servant who inspired millions. We believe Mr. Johnson's life and legacy are fully deserving of this prestigious honor, and we hope you give him full and fair consideration.

Rafer Johnson was born on August 18, 1934, in the Jim Crow South before moving with his family to Kingsburg, California. Despite facing challenges of racism and poverty, he thrived in football, baseball, basketball, and most notably, track and field.

Mr. Johnson later attended the University of California, Los Angeles, where he would be elected student body president, the second Black UCLA student to do so. He continued to excel in athletics, especially the decathlon, an event in which he would go on to win the Pan American Games in 1955 as a freshman in college and a silver medal at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. In 1960, Mr. Johnson was chosen to be the first Black captain of a U.S. Olympic team and carried the American flag into Rome's Olympic stadium. He went on to win gold at the games, setting an Olympic record in the decathlon.

When he returned from the 1960 Olympics, Mr. Johnson began a prolific acting career and became involved in public service and activism. Throughout the 1960s, he worked with the State Department to visit other countries as a goodwill ambassador, where he would build campus and classroom exchange programs. Mr. Johnson was also present the night of Robert F. Kennedy's assassination and helped apprehend the assassin, Sirhan Sirhan, risking his own life in doing so. He would later serve as one of the pallbearers at Senator Kennedy's funeral.

Arguably, Mr. Johnson's most enduring legacy was working with Eunice Kennedy Shriver to establish the Special Olympics in 1968, which is now an international organization dedicated to allowing all people, regardless of intellectual or developmental disability, to compete in sports. He was also a founding member of the California Special Olympics, and later founded and chaired the Southern California Chapter of the Special Olympics. Throughout his life, he remained dedicated to the mission and growth of the organization, serving as President of the Board of Directors of the California Special Olympics for nearly a decade.

Due to his longstanding and selfless service to our country, he was chosen for the honor of lighting the Olympic torch at the 1984 Los Angeles Summer Olympics. He was also honored by being inducted into the California Hall of Fame, the National High School Hall of Fame, and the National Track and Field Hall of Fame – all fitting tributes to an individual who worked to make all sports more diverse and inclusive.

Rafer Johnson passed away in his home on December 2, 2020, at the age of 86. He left behind an incredible legacy of excellence and service. He was not only one of the greatest athletes in American history, but a leader who worked to build bridges in a segregated world, broke barriers for people of color, and strove to make this world a better place than the one he was born into.

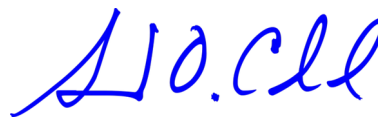
Mr. Johnson's compassion and dedication to serving others are exemplary reasons for why he deserves the honor of posthumously receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom. His legacy serves as a blueprint for all Americans on how to dedicate one's life to the service of others.

Thank you for your consideration of Mr. Rafer Lewis Johnson for the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

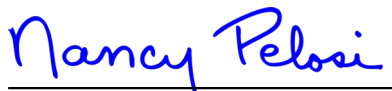
Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Nancy Pelosi
Member of Congress



Steven Horsford
Member of Congress



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



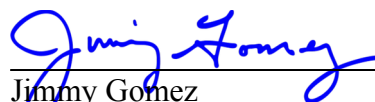
Tony Cárdenas
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Robert Garcia
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Adam B. Schiff
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Member of Congress



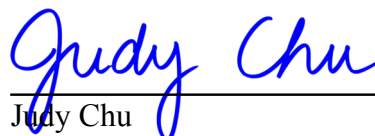
Katie Porter
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J. Luis Correa
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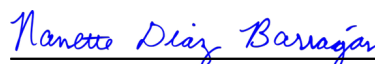
Julia Brownley
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Judy Chu
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Norma J. Torres
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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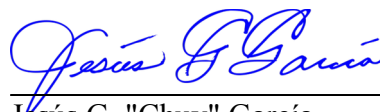
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
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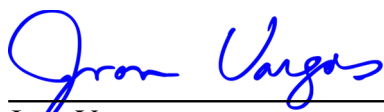
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Adriano Espaillat
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



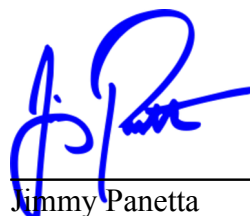
Juan Vargas
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Jim Costa
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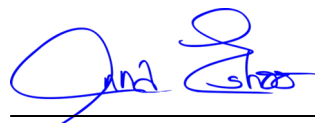
Pete Aguilar
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Ami Bera, M.D.
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Mark DeSaulnier
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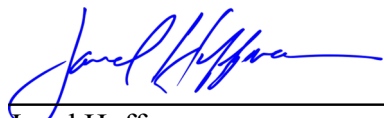
Anna G. Eshoo
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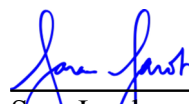
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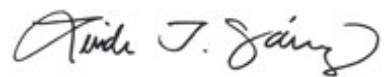
Kevin Mullin
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Grace F. Napolitano
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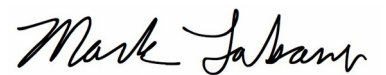
Scott H. Peters
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Linda T. Sánchez
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Eric Swalwell
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Mark Takano
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Maxine Waters
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Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
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David G. Valadao
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André Carson

André Carson
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